

FREEDOM

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SLASH AND BURN

Funding cuts hit fire service

Following severe warnings from the Fire Brigades Union over government mishandling of the service, cuts have been announced in the Northeast and Southwest of the country.

After a grants round which saw a large drop in funding for some sectors, cutbacks are set to bite heavily in North Yorkshire and the South West.

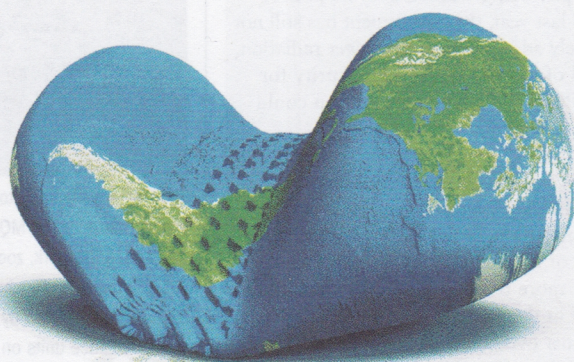
Humbly Grove Fire and Rescue Authority want to make budget cuts of £4 million over the next three years, with four stations closing despite having done better than most out of the spending round. Local fire crews estimate the cuts will see the loss of one in ten frontline firefighter posts. In nearby Kirton Lindsey and Immingham, two in ten will go. Cleveland fire authority says it needs to make savings of at least £2.1 million.

In Devon meanwhile, a £1.8 million shortfall has led to plans for full-time cover to be slashed at Ilfracombe, Exmouth, Paignton and Plympton fire stations, and in Cornwall a demonstration took place earlier this month against cuts there.

FBU rep Duncan Milligan, interviewed by *Freedom*, said the cuts are part of a continuous loss of funding which is hitting services hard: "Since 1997 there's been a cut of 1,500 firefighters, to 30,700. There's been

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LENS CAP TV BLOCKAGE



WHAT WAS THAT BUMP?

The 8th January saw the beginning of a trial in British Columbia over the right of campaigning magazine *Adbusters* to put out politically charged advertising on Canadian television. The case sees them pitted against the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Global Television and CRTC. For more than a decade, *Adbusters* has been trying to pay major commercial broadcasters to air its public-service TV spots, but these attempts have been routinely blocked by network executives, often with little or no explanation. In 2004, *Adbusters* filed a lawsuit arguing that the public has a constitutionally protected freedom of expression over the public airwaves.

SCHOOLS OUT FOR EVER

The latest drive to improve education by New Labour got off to a bad start after Edinburgh city council set up a cross-party group to decide which schools get closed in 2008.

The renewed threat of closures resurrects a plan which local people had believed to be over when a community campaign overturned the proposed closure of 22 schools and four community centres in the city last year.

Edinburgh's cuts are caused by a council budget deficit of over £10m, which critics say has been caused by mismanagement and overspends, which the council is attempting to rectify by slashing public spending on important services.

The failures of Edinburgh council highlight deep-rooted problems in New Labour's promise to revitalise education, which saw

the party embarrassed in December when the UK was shown to have one of the least well-educated populations in the developed world, with reading skills in particular freefalling from 3rd to 18th between 1997 and 2007.

Despite increasing headline funding for education since 1997, the government gives the calculated money per head of the population directly to local councils. With funding cuts and inefficiencies elsewhere in local budgets, education has repeatedly been raided to make up for shortfalls.

The government is planning to implement 'ringfencing' to force councils to spend education budgets on education, however even if this measure succeeds, it is likely to prompt large cuts elsewhere in council-run services.

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

BENEFITS: A new proposal by Tory leader David Cameron would see claimants sent to work for free in local factories or do community work in exchange for benefits. Cameron suggested that his plan could be backed by stopped payments if work is refused, and it is specifically targeted at people claiming Incapacity Benefit. The measure would potentially force millions of people to undercut wages, particularly in unskilled sectors.

ENERGY: A group of scientists and academics have condemned the government's plans for a new generation of nuclear power stations as undemocratic and possibly illegal. The nuclear consultation group have warned that despite being warned over its poor research last year, the government has still not adequately addressed concerns over radiation, disposal of nuclear waste and security for and facilities built. The intervention could trigger fresh legal action.

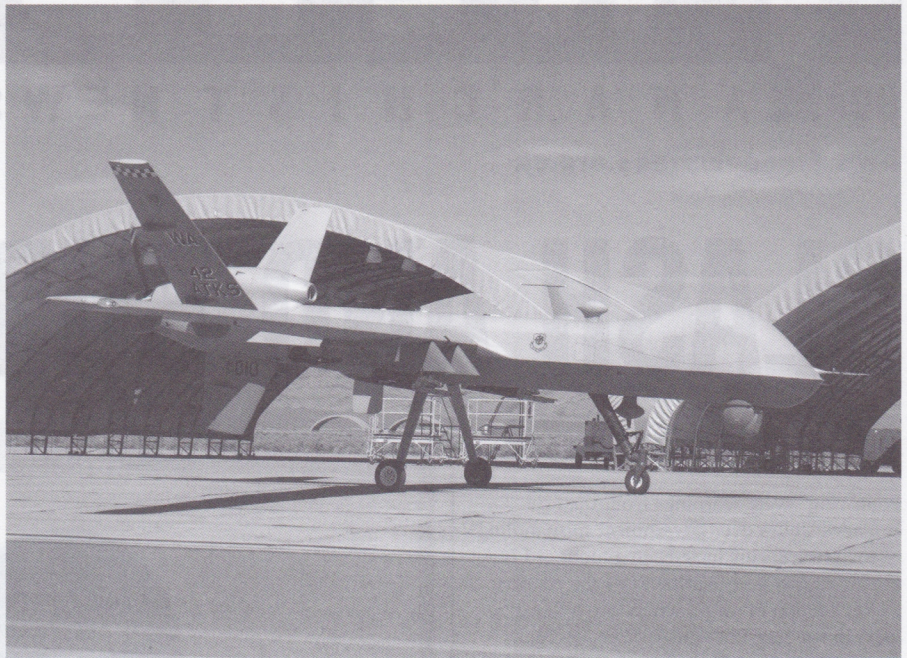
HEALTH: Student nurses are racking up more debt than ever before, a new survey from Unison has revealed. It shows that the number of nursing and health students with debts of more than £20,000 has virtually doubled in the past year. While the average debt is just over £7,000, some are in the red by more than £25,000 – a 26% jump from last year. “Sadly health students are getting a real crash course in debt,” said Gail Adams, UNISON’s head of nursing. With a newly qualified nurse earning less than £20,000 a year, “it will take years to clear these crushing debts,” she said.

IMMIGRATION: Tyneside Community Action for are holding a march against racism on 19th January as part of their campaigning work for asylum rights. TCAR believes that the Labour Government is using racism as a divide and rule tactic. In the last 10 years the Labour Government has introduced five major pieces of legislation on immigration, creating new ‘offences’ that apply exclusively to immigrants.

JOB CUTS: A union threat of industrial action over job cuts at the BBC has been suspended to allow further talks. Management have agreed to delay giving notice of any dismissals until 23rd January and will use the hiatus to continue discussions with the unions which were broken off in November.

POLICE: The Police Federation have complained that the government are curtailing their freedoms by attempting to ban a protest march through Westminster over a poor pay award. The Metropolitan Police have final say over the direction of the march, and have been accused of being heavy-handed in dealing with it. It is unclear who would ‘maintain order’ should the demonstrations turn ugly, and FIT would presumably be unavailable to film the demonstrators.

LENS CAP SEEING ALL



The RAF are planning to use unmanned drone planes to monitor everyone attending the London 2012 Olympics, it has emerged. The MQ-9 ‘Reaper’ pictured above, will be able to use specially designed imaging systems, which can see in the dark, zoom in on individuals and track them through scrubland by tracking their heat signal. The five-tonne craft, which have recently seen use in Afghanistan, will circle the capital throughout the Games, and will be operated by the RAF’s 39 Squadron. Reapers are in use by the US both as weapons platforms and as surveillance units on the Mexican border to pick up any tired and hungry who might try to cross. The RAF currently run three of the drones, and the use of Reapers for internal surveillance is likely to be a test for their capacity, as the RAF are lobbying the government for an expansion of the programme to a full squad of ten with surveillance as their main role. Each Reaper can stay in the air for up to 14 hours with pilots operating in shifts, allowing for near-constant coverage of a given area.

Real cost of F365

In their own analysis of the effects of Faslane 365, an anti-military campaign which ran for an entire year, the MoD police have revised their cost estimates upwards by £1 million.

The campaign, which saw over a thousand people arrested at over a hundred separate actions, repeatedly disrupted access to the naval base in Scotland through a series of peaceful gate and road blocks from October 2006 to October 2007.

Estimates originally suggested that £5 million had been spent, but in an article for *Talk Through*, the magazine for the military police, Chief Inspector Jim Gillen, the Deputy Senior Police Officer at Her Majesty’s Naval Base (HMNB) Clyde admitted the real figure was much higher.

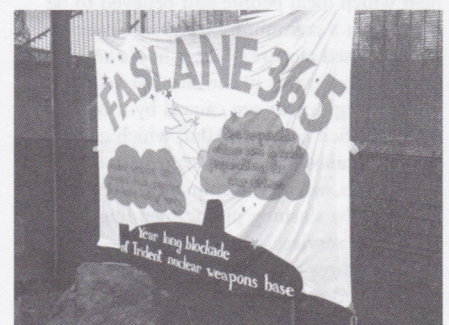
In the article, he noted that the military had initially hoped the demonstrations would die out within a couple of weeks, but strong support from around the country, with a number of political, religious and regional groups turning out, had taken them by surprise.

However Gillen also claimed a number of victories for the police, saying that inside the compound activity was able to continue as normal, and ships were not held up despite

an incursion by Greenpeace vessel the Arctic Sunrise.

The final day of Faslane 365 saw around a thousand people from across the UK and Europe descend on the main gates of the base. By 7am, the Northern Gate was blockaded with protesters chaining bits of their bodies to the gates and others super-gluing themselves together and pouring paint over themselves to impede police.

By 8.30am, the South Gates were blocked preventing all road access to the base. Two hours later the police response had kicked in with around 100 arrests, and at the day’s end they tallied an impressive 180.





BAA back down on pensions

Pension funds in the black, but attacks set to continue

In the wake of BAA's failed attempt to close its final salary pension scheme, conflicting reports have emerged over the future of the UK's remaining final salary pension schemes.

Final salary pension schemes base the payout for retiring workers on their last wage – usually their highest. The schemes are usually changed for new employees to defined contribution (which effectively give out payments based on your average wage over your lifetime) or money purchase schemes, which pay out significantly less.

Unite and the PCS claimed victory earlier this month when BAA backed down over the threat of New Year strikes from firefighters, security, maintenance, administrative and clerical staff at seven major airports. The

future of the company pension pot is now to go to consultation, but new entrants are to be excluded in future, weakening the unions' position.

The dispute may herald the beginning of the end of the main assault on the sector, according to The National Association of Pension Funds (NAPF), which has stated it believes that the sector is 'finding a new equilibrium' after the upheavals of the last few years.

Two-thirds of UK schemes have closed to new members and 5% have closed their doors to all contributions since the industry reported large deficits in the funds following heavy losses in the technology crash of 2001, the scrapping of pension tax credits in 1997 and pensions 'holidays' in the 90s.

The losses, which totalled in the hundreds of billions, led to pension trustees – often board members of the companies involved – attempting to clear their pensions deficits by

attacking members' conditions.

Most funds have now moved into substantial profit following the combination of a recovered stock market and the effects of austerity measures, but remain vulnerable as they are heavily invested in sub-prime lending and risky stock holdings.

Gordon Brown is again considering offering pensions holidays to companies.

Despite this, a further 15% of schemes are planning to close to new members within the next five years and switch to defined contribution or money purchase schemes, while 6% could close to existing staff, according to an NAPF survey of funds.

The introduction of the government's new 'personal accounts' scheme for state pensions comes online will also impact on schemes, which expect to begin measures such as automatic enrolment into their schemes for new employees, or closing them altogether and switching to the state's plan.

Slash and burn

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a ten-year downward trend in employment but the work has been expanding greatly including responsibility for major incidents.

"What has happened this year is the new spending grant, which has affected some areas very badly. In our view money is being diverted into the regional fire control centre project rather than going into front line services.

"The cuts in recent years, the pressure from grants really being squeezed is that money being held back because of the mounting costs of the project. We are convinced that costs are going to really mount up in the next year or so."

The union has found that plans to replace all forty six of the fire service's local 999 command and control centres in England with nine regional control centres are already running years late and are massively over budget.

In parliamentary questions, it was revealed that the original £100 million budget set aside for implementation of the project has ballooned to £1.4 billion, which only covers 15 of the planned 25-year lease being committed to.

The government have said that the upward revision of the figure is largely down to the incorporation of IT services, yet the contract awarded to EADS Defence and Security

Systems last March only accounts for £200 million of that figure, and £400 million of the increase has occurred within the last 12 months.

The project, which was originally slated to open its first centre in November 2006, has overrun by a massive three years and is now due to open in October 2009.

As the cuts continue, it has been found that while domestic deaths from fire are continuing to fall, five out of the last six years have been the worst on record for losses to commercial services, and firefighter deaths are at a 30-year high.

Rob Ray

BUSINESS

Wobblies blockade

Wobblies blockade phones over blood service

Monday 7th January saw the return of MPs to Parliament. It also saw the syndicalist IWW union co-ordinate an international phone blockade as part of their campaign to stop cuts to the National Blood Service.

Phones were tied up all day as campaigners and supporters from as far afield as Poland, Canada, and the United States, as well as hundreds from around the UK, took part in the event, designed to warn health minister Alan Johnson that cuts are unacceptable.

The action took place ahead of the NHSBT Board meeting on the 10th, where bosses have met to take stock of the management review into their cuts plans.

As this paper goes to publication, Board members have already made a decision on their cuts closure plans.

Over the course of the next month the IWW campaign aims to co-ordinate support from across different sections of society.

In the latest phase of the campaign, launched over Christmas, the IWW brought the number of members of the anti-cuts NBS support campaign to over a thousand. The campaign aims to leverage this through developing a network of 'campaign broadcasters' throughout the country to distribute newsletters and campaign materials and co-ordinate grassroots action and involvement.

In addition to this the IWW is in the process of implementing a number of structural changes to the campaign aimed at allowing the organisation to mobilise rapidly to changing developments through a new support committee, as the entire organisation swings behind the campaign. "We have a few



tricks up our sleeves. We are going to hit these clowns hard over the next few weeks" said London Branch Secretary Ant Ince.

To find out more go to nbs.iww.org, or read the staff campaign blog: nbs-sos.blogspot.com

In a separate development, campaigning group Health Emergency have warned that moves to push responsibility for a range of home-based procedures onto patients would raise serious safety issues and could destroy what is left of the district nursing service.

District nurses have been heavily hit by localised NHS cuts in recent years – despite the Government's stated policy of providing

more personalised care in the home. A drive to force patients to manage their own blood pressure, pain control and a range of other procedures would open the door to an all-out assault on district and community nursing budgets.

Geoff Martin, Health Emergency Head of Campaigns, said: "If the Government really want to save money they could start by pulling back from the costly fiasco of the Private Finance Initiative, cutting the billions wasted on management consultants and external advisers and ending the re-organisation mania that has led to an explosion in NHS bureaucracy."

Buslem strike is extended

Postal workers in Burslem have voted to extend their strike action until the end of the month, in support of twelve suspended colleagues.



The ballot, which saw the Midlands-based workforce vote Yes by 79 votes to two, continues a strong level of solidarity which the CWU are looking to extend as it ballots a further 1,500 workers in the surrounding area.

Over 100 workers are currently refusing to deliver mail, and have been since 7th December, and managers have been unable to do the job.

Royal Mail have refused to allow an independent appeals panel to look at their decision to sack 12 people with over 200 years of experience between them, despite allegations of bullying behaviour from managers.

The cull took place shortly after the winding up of the major industrial dispute between Royal Mail and the CWU last year.

Lee Barron, CWU Midlands Regional

Secretary, said: "The courage and determination of postal workers at Burslem is exceptional. The vote this week is better than the original ballot for industrial action because workers can clearly see the injustice of the situation.

"All we are asking for is that Royal Mail has this case heard by an independent appeals panel. We have even suggested going to mediation through the TUC or ACAS but Royal Mail are still refusing – what do they have to hide?"

There will be a national march and rally in support of the striking Burslem workers on Saturday 19th January. Marchers will assemble outside Burslem delivery office on Scotia Business Park at 1.30pm.

You can send messages of support and donations to: CWU, Midland No 7, Lindsay Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 4EP.

IN BRIEF

FOOD: Prices for basic foodstuffs have spiked to their highest prices in years, following a surge in oil prices to \$100 a barrel.

The rise comes as traders anticipate a major increase in demand for foodstuffs as biofuel capacity is brought online, bringing food consumption into direct competition with fuel use for the first time on the open market. As a result, buyers for transport and industrial uses are forcing prices up for a range of foodstuffs. Soyabeans, corn, wheat, rapeseed and palm oil have all hit or neared record highs. Global biofuel demand could increase from 10 billion gallons a year in 2005 to 25bn gallons annually by 2010, an annual growth rate of 20%. Extreme weather events and drought have also hit harvests and exporting countries, such as Russia and Ukraine, have imposed export tariffs.

UTILITIES: A massive increase in gas and electricity bills is set to be announced by all the major energy companies in the next few weeks. Energy companies are preparing to increase fuel bills by 15% following a decision by Npower to raise prices early this month. The increases will make household gas and electricity bills almost double what they were five years ago.

Officially, firms say they are 'monitoring movements in the energy markets' where oil surged through the \$100-a-barrel level for the first time last week. But in private they admit price rises are inevitable in the next four weeks.

INTEREST RATES: The Bank of England have held interest rates despite a poor retail performance over Christmas. A business outcry over the issue from business reflects growing anxiety over the prospect of a recession in 2008, with several major companies posting poor results in their quarterly reports. The government have little room to manoeuvre with the PFI-based spending boom of the late '90s and early noughties largely removing any chance of higher government spending to buoy up confidence. Large amounts of money are tied up in 30-year schemes, or has been spent on the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

TRANSPORT: Network Rail may take a step towards renationalisation by taking some of its maintenance and upgrade work in-house, following a disastrous festive period where private companies missed deadlines for major network upgrades.

More than 250,000 passengers had journeys disrupted by the four-day overrun at Rugby and a similar 24-hour stoppage at Liverpool Street station in London over the New Year period.

All major upgrades are still done by contractors, but Network Rail have signalled that it was reviewing their future role with a view to doing more work itself.

The cost of water

Consultation on a major two-year prices review by water regulator Ofwat ends this month, with the group pushing through plans to do away with cost-based pricing in favour of a directly competitive model.

The shakeup, which will be completed in 2009, follows the publishing last month of 25-year plans for the water industry by all major companies, and forms part of a complete overhaul of how water is provided in the UK.

In their reviews, all companies have said they will impose above-inflation price rises, and have refused to rule out large hikes.

Ofwat currently sets the prices for the sector based on an estimated 'reasonable cost' for the industry in providing clean water and sewage services. The regulator has however been repeatedly embarrassed by abuse of the system.

Last year it had to fine Thames Water £12.5 million and Southern Water £20 million, after they misreported data, leading

Ofwat to approve price rises well above what was required. Ofwat is also likely to fine Severn Trent Water, and is investigating a fifth company, Three Valleys Water.

United Utilities meanwhile has been fined £8.5 million for paying high prices to its unregulated sister companies and then arguing that bills should be higher based on the increased rates.

In response, Ofwat is arguing that regulations from the industry should gradually be withdrawn as the new pricing model comes online, as it will promote competition and render regulation obsolete.

Industry guidelines suggest that water costs should be no more than 3% of household income, otherwise it is placing an unacceptable level of strain on budgets.

On average, 11% of the population falls into this category, with the worst case being South West Water, where over 30% of all its customers are paying over the threshold.



Bus drivers walk out

As *Freedom* goes to press two more strikes at Wilts and Dorset bus company look set to go ahead over excessive working hours which drivers believe are dangerous for their safety on the roads.

Over 375 five company drivers walked out in the first strike on January 3, shutting down the transport network, while a skeleton service was maintained on 8th January and more are set for the 16th and 21st January if the company does not back down.

The RMT unionists have said drivers should not be rostered to do more than 4.5 hours of continuous driving, while Wilts and Dorset say they have offered a pay rise and weekly hours reduction instead. At present, drivers are expected to do five hours, the

maximum allowed under EU law.

The strikes had already been suspended last summer for talks, but negotiations have seen no movement.

"For more than 18 months Wilts and Dorset has chipped away at drivers' turn-around time and ignored complaints that they are expecting drivers to spend too much time behind the wheel without adequate breaks," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said.

Wilts and Dorset drivers have twice voted by margins of more than ten to one to take strike action.

The dispute hits services in areas including Bournemouth, Poole, New Forest and Swanage, although the company's depot in Salisbury is not affected.

INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH: There has been a return to work after two days of strikes and protests which spread to 50 factories and involved thousands of garment workers in Mirpur, Dhaka. Workers were persuaded to call off the strike by leaders of workers organisations (unions are not officially recognised by garment bosses) after two days of protesting the death of a co-worker forced to continue work whilst sick. The movement quickly spread to most nearby factories. It remains unclear whether those workers sacked as a result of the agitation will be reinstated.

INDONESIA: On 4th January workers in Indonesia voiced their protest in a rally against repressive measures meted out to trade unionists in Iran, and called for the release of all imprisoned union activists. The action pre-empted an official visit to Iran of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Initiated by the ITF-affiliated Indonesian seafarers' union, Kesatuan Pelaut Indonesia, the rally saw more than 500 workers gather in front of the presidential palace in Jakarta. The workers were demonstrating against the continued imprisonment of Mansour Osanloo, President of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company and Mahmoud Salehi, President of the Saquez Bakers' Union.

IRAQ: The Iraqi government is barring gays from its list of some 5,000 prisoners who could be granted amnesty in the next few weeks. The measure continues a strongly homophobic attitude from the new government, which has also criticised death counts from the west for including gays, and is widely rumoured to have tacitly endorsed militia killings. While homosexuality is not illegal in Iraq, gay spokespeople have alleged that arrests are continuing to happen on trumped up charges.

MEXICO: Farmers organised scattered protests on 2nd and 3rd January as the final trade barriers on US corn, beans, sugar and milk fell with the full implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement on New Year's Day. Corn and beans are staples of the Mexican diet and subsistence crops for millions of farmers. Opponents of NAFTA said the free entry of relatively cheap US corn would devastate rural Mexico and help spur more immigration.

RUSSIA: The Russian government has announced plans to cut migration by two-thirds this year. The measure comes as racist attacks in the country continue to increase, and follow on from regulations which have barred immigrants from working in some retail sectors. In 2007, six million workers were allowed into Russia from the other former Soviet republics without visas. The Federal Migration Service has told the news agency, Interfax, that the number will be cut to two million.

LENS CAP CHILE



The funeral procession of Matias Catrileo Quezada, a 22-year-old university student and Mapuche supporter. Matias was shot dead by police during a land re-occupation near the southern city of Vilcun. The indigenous Mapuche peoples of southern Chile regularly clash with authorities over control of their ancestral lands but this is the first fatality that has resulted from the conflict since 2003. The incident took place earlier this month at dawn when a group of about 25 Mapuche Indians and their supporters raided a farm and burned the livestock feed. Police who had been charged with protecting the farm after a number of similar incursions gave chase and fired on the group who retreated to a nearby school. Catrileo was shot in the stomach and died at the scene.

Engineers break out

The train engineers' union GDL has gone back to the negotiating table after calling off strike action against the federal railroad, Deutsche Bahn.

The union, which has made headlines for being the first major group to break from the a-political 'united trade union' stance which has dominated German unionism for decades, has been campaigning to bring engineers' wages closer to those of their French and Swiss counterparts.

Originally the GDL demanded a 31% increase in wages across the board, but union bosses have now reduced this to 11%.

Deutsche Bahn were dealt a bloody nose by the scale and length of the protests, which far exceeded what was expected. German media

groups have heralded the strike as signifying a possible end to the postwar trade union consensus in the country and the beginning of a new strike wave from other influential union groups.

Unions have until now tended to operate under the German Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), notorious for its unwillingness to enter active dispute, but steep decline in the membership of German unions over the last decade has dented confidence in it.

The GFTU have decried the GDL strikes as effectively marking 'the end of solidarity', and has predicted that unions of skilled workers with a greater ability to dictate terms will pull away and undermine the clout of more general unions.

Notes from the United States

The picture in the United States at the start of 2008 is not a pleasant or happy one. There are gaps aplenty between those who have and those who have not; much suffering; inequalities galore.

At the end of last year the government released statistics that show the gap between America's richest and poorest to be as great as it's been in a quarter of a century. The richest 1% of the country grabbed over a fifth of all money earned in 2005.

Current data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development suggests

that on any given night three quarters of a million people are without a home. Families with children are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population nationwide and make up nearly half of all people staying in the all too few shelters remaining in large urban areas. These numbers – like rents – are increasing.

But many who do have homes – about 30 million low-income American households, according to a recent report by Reuters – will go cold this winter.

Cocoa strike success

Workers across the cocoa industry in Ivory Coast have gone back to work after winning a strike action which brought shipments to a standstill at the beginning of January.

The strikers wanted to secure better pay and working conditions, and oust senior management in government agencies accused of severe malpractice.

Work resumed after the government conceded and raised wages, but unionists, and industry analysts, have warned that further strike action is highly likely if their demand for the sacking of the director general of the Coffee and Cocoa Bourse (BCC, which regulates the marketing and export of cocoa) is not met.

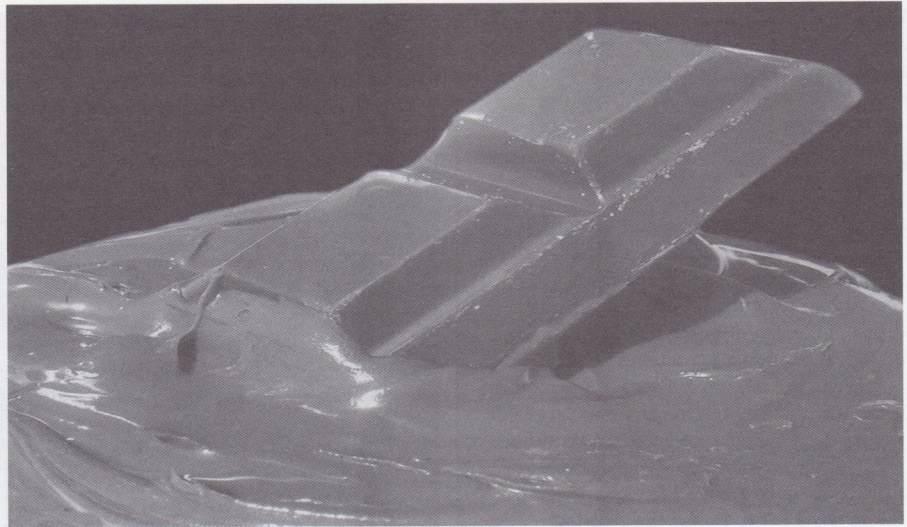
Towards the end of the industrial action, SYNASGFICC unionists at the BCC and other industry bodies blocked registration of cocoa shipments for export. The strike followed walkouts in early December, which were called off for negotiations which never happened.

Philippe Zohou Bi, deputy secretary general of the union representing staff at the BCC, said some staff who had initially scabbed by continuing to process some cocoa exports during the first three days of the strike had been physically stopped by union activists.

"We're getting tougher and prevented the alternative (export) registration system which the BCC director set up near his office, from working," he said at the time.

"It's true that exporters could register [shipments] during the strike ... but we barricaded the office where the computers are and chased out the workers using them."

If the tactic is repeated in future, it could cause major problems for bosses who are



anxious to get this year's wares away on time.

Ivory Coast's cocoa industry, the largest producer in the world accounting for 40% of world production and selling to Mars, Kraft and Nestlé among others, is highly controversial.

The extremely profitable cocoa fields in the region have been a major source of funding both for the rebel armies in the north and the government in the south. An investigation by anti-corruption organisation Global Witness found that in the most recent conflict, the civil war of 2002, \$112m was illegally diverted towards war materiel by both sides from cocoa sales. Thousands died.

Global Witness further allege that the two sides in the civil war, which recently signed a peace accord and are said to be disarming,

are continuing to draw profit from the sector through embezzlement and corruption.

The war has undermined cocoa prices for farmers who until recently had been able to sell their beans direct to companies for a reasonable profit, but who are now reliant on buyers thanks to the destruction of the transport network, who are gouging them over prices.

As a result, despite growing demand for cocoa and rising prices on world markets, farmers have been receiving less.

The \$1.2bn industry has also come in for fierce criticism for its child labour practices, with a recent expose by a major newspaper tracking child slaves across the continent and finding that the number of enslaved could be as high as 12,000.

Notes from the United States

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Avoidable lack of resources in, and inadequate funding for, the government's 'Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program' means that only 16% of the 38 million poor households eligible for the programme in the country will receive necessary assistance.

And governments and state agencies are far from doing their share to aid anyone else: also towards the end of last month figures showed that guest and migrant workers in North America sent more than \$300 billion (£150 billion) in 2006 to their families abroad. According to the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Inter-American Development Bank, it's self-help that's doing the most good – not official, designated aid: the money sent between families, many of whom can hardly afford it, is nearly three times as great as that which the world's leading donors sent.

At the same time the Bush junta has

requested – and seems likely to get – nearly US\$200 billion (£100 billion) more to prosecute the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. If approved, it would bring expenditure since 11th September 2001 on death and destruction by the United States elite in those two countries alone to a staggering US\$23,000 (£12,000) every minute. The *Washington Post* recently calculated that if spending continues at this rate, by the end of Bush's presidency, the cost of the wars will have proportionally exceeded those of the whole Korean and Vietnam wars combined.

And, making sure that not too many see these obscenities and object, the United States is now ranked by Privacy International and the Electronic Privacy Information Center in the worst possible company with the same 'endemic surveillance societies' as China, Russia, Singapore and Malaysia.

Louis Further

Zapatistas fear war in Chiapas

Intelligence reports from the Chiapas region of Mexico suggest that the Mexican government may be planning a military attack for later this year. According to the Zapatistas, who have set up a series of autonomous communities in the region which run a dual system of 'good councils' with rotating membership, along with mass assemblies for major decisions, local Mexican army bases have shown increased levels of activity. New weaponry has been seen on the bases, along with rumoured sightings of special forces groups. The movements come as the Mexican government scales up its attempts to undermine solidarity in the region, with expropriations of indigenous land being given to people linked to rightist paramilitary groups.

In many cases the land is already settled by Zapatista families, leading to clashes (death threats and beatings have already occurred) which the government could use to justify military intervention.

FEATURE

Looking back at 2007

Rob Ray rounds up last year's front pages

January

The year got off to an environmentally-minded start when protests over the destruction of Iceland's pristine wilderness by a major damming project spilled over onto the streets of London, with campaigners blockading company offices, doing banner drops of the Tate Modern and St Paul's cathedral and leafleting around the city.

Later in the month, a discussion piece with a member of HSG raised fears that proposals to give Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) the power to hand out ASBOs in their community represented an attempt by the government to funnel the growing number of independent community organisations into state-led enforcement roles. TMOs had thus far had little success incorporating campaigning residential groups into a controllable structure.

February

The World Social Forum came in for some heavy criticism as organisers charged heavily for entry, provided food at extortionate prices, and took funding from the Italian state and corporate sponsors.

Kenyan delegates were asked to pay the equivalent of the minimum monthly wage to enter, while western delegates were asked to pay \$110, and asked to take their trip via Kenya Airways, which was at the time in dispute with its workforce over alleged racism and union-busting, because a tie-in deal had been agreed for cheap flights.

Also in February, in a damning report on inequality in British healthcare, it was found that Britain has the worst level of care for children of all the world's 21 richest countries, despite being the fifth most wealthy.

The blame for this was laid squarely at the feet of inequality and the rapidly rising divide between rich and poor. Infant mortality in lower-income households is double that of higher income ones. Poor nutrition, unfit housing, poor access to maternity services and expensive/inadequate public transport were all cited in the report by the Fabian Society.

March

In March *Freedom* looked at the International Intelligence Summit in Florida, a meeting of some of the most influential private intelligence groups and state representatives. Large sectors of what used to be state-run intelligence gathering are now being outsourced to private companies, helping to hide illegal practices from scrutiny. We also took a look at a raft of major anarchist events slated for the summer, including the Projectile film festival, Schnews Media Malarkey and Earth First!, in a special



The Mayday march following the i07 anarcho-syndicalist conference in Paris

preview issue, interviewing the organisers of all three.

April

Freedom drew attention to huge double standards being employed in the coverage of Mugabe's Regime in Zimbabwe as mainstream attention reached fever pitch over a series of brutal evictions of land from white ownership. Despite similar violence in nearby Angola, little coverage materialised, and in Mugabe's own regime, it was not until white property owners began to complain that serious notice was taken of the country's plight, and no criticism was levelled at New Labour's refusal to live up to their promise to fund a non-violent and gradual redistribution of land.

For the Mayday issue, *Freedom* took a look at the celebration around the globe, as well as at home. Anarchists again formed a reasonable bloc on the London march, while the largest to be seen was in Venezuela, where over a million turned out in Caracas. In China, the annual farce of a massive military show to commemorate the occasion was as impressive as always, while Paris had one of the more multicultural marches following the success of i07, a major anarcho-syndicalist conference held in the city.

May

In the early May issue, *Freedom* looked into the rise of surveillance culture in Asda following the exposure of a spy-ring at parent company Wal-Mart. The revelations by union and official sources were shocking. A source at the GMB noted that bugging has been a very real fear ever since the union became involved with organising campaigns at the supermarket's warehouses, while technology now implemented gives Asda the ability to track every movement of its warehouse workforce, from how fast they drive to what snacks they eat. What's more, senior figures at Asda have said this surveillance will prove useful in 'rooting out the red'.

May also saw the scandal around BAE and its alleged bribing of Saudi chiefs spectacularly blow up and force Tony Blair to halt an investigation into misuse of funds 'in the national interest'. The company was allegedly caught out not just in Saudi Arabia, but also in South Africa, South America and Eastern Europe. The Campaign Against The Arms Trade, when it tried to bring a law suit against the move, was itself infiltrated by a BAE-paid agent.

FEATURE



Postal workers on the picket line in Coventry during July

June

The arrest and trial of Jose Padilla on charges of conspiracy to murder, kidnap and conspiracy to aid terrorists in the US caused a major stir as even the judge noted that the government was 'light on facts' in choosing to lock him up without trial for over three years. Since then, the government has managed to get a verdict which effectively means they can charge someone for agreeing to do something in the future – predictive imprisonment. Meanwhile, a man who has admitted blowing up a Cuban airliner, killing 73 people, walked free after less than a year, after being prosecuted not for terrorism and multiple murder, but for immigration violation.

July

Freedom reported on three major general unions, Amicus, the T&G and GMB, joining nuclear worker's union Prospect in throwing their weight behind nuclear power as the next major investment to be made in UK infrastructure. Signing a deal with nuclear giant ACEL, they agreed to back the company in return for a guarantee British workers would get the jobs. The stitchup incensed green groups, who said they'd "nailed their colours to the wrong mast".

The major industrial dispute of the year, between postal workers and Royal Mail, kicked off in style with solid walkouts and demands for fair treatment by bosses Alan Leighton and Adam Crozier. The issue would go on to dominate headlines for months.

August

By early August the dispute had caused rumblings of discontent across the public sector. Everyone was getting 2.5%, while real inflation was running at closer to 5%. Everyone was getting a pay cut, while at the top of the tree, board members, senior management and city slickers were getting record breaking and inflation-busting bonuses. Balloting for industrial action was talked about at major unions including the PCS, Unison and the Royal College of Nursing. The possibility of co-ordinated action was bandied about, but in the end never materialised.

September

As September arrived, Unison dropped out of the running after a weak campaign and neutral stance on the government's offer to the NHS by the union hierarchy. Despite the collapse of the campaign in health, the postal workers were causing Royal Mail more

trouble than ever, and local government workers were expressing intense dissatisfaction not just over wage, but over a major new round of job cuts going through the service.

October

The Olympic machine finally ploughed over the traces of community gardens and allotments which Londoners had been fighting to save with the closure of the Manor gardens by the Olympic Delivery Authority in October. The allotment holders joined footballers, homeowners and wildlife on the list of groups unhomed by the march to 2012.

At the other end of the country, an investigation by Unison exposed huge misuse of public funding in the driver for PFI schemes, demonstrating that private contracting was costing up to £2.1bn than state-run counterparts, while the state continued to take the risks associated with such projects. The expose chimed well with the extraordinary spectacle of Metronet, one of the largest rail PFI schemes, declaring itself bankrupt after years of problems, only to see the government rush in with rescue funding, having already repeatedly subsidised and bailed out the group.

November

Two building bills took the splash in November, as the government continued to struggle to come to grips with the mess that it had made of housing and planning reform. Planning reforms being brought in are intended to weaken local input into major building works, stripping away local input and environmental lobbying. Alongside this, a new Housing Bill tacitly accepted that transferring council housing to Housing Associations has not led to the hoped-for increase of homes for a growing population, so the new plan is to give public money to private developers direct.

December

Freedom interviewed an activist in the London Coalition Against Poverty as the group pushed forward with its campaign to force councils to live up to their responsibilities. The campaign focuses on a combination of legal support and direct action to back up its caseload.

And finally, in a festive treat, the government announced full details of its plans for the 'Thames Gateway' region, an area stretching from coastal Essex much of the way up the river. An investigation into the figures by *Freedom* suggested that despite large headline figures for investment, the main focus of the plan is to move the working class out of the city, bypassing complaints from people already living in the areas to be regenerated, and the implementation of a full working model of public/private partnership across the region.

COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

Well this is all looking nice isn't it? As the more sharp-eyed amongst you may have noticed, we've gone A4 for this issue, as an experiment to see how (and if) it might work. Among the more interesting bits and pieces are the introduction of a two page 'theory and activism' section, with theory being organised by perennial feature writer James Horrox, and activism done by myself, largely subbing down interesting tidbits about the movement which have come to my attention as I trawl around.

The idea behind this is to, in the case of theory, build up a short-but-sweet series on anarchist political theory, filling in the gap between things like the voluminous FAQ and the short overviews of basic anarchism that are around at the moment. For activism, we're often accused of not catering to it, so this should help redress the balance.

We've also reorganised the news section to take advantage of multiple pages, so the public and private sectors get their own sections, and there is a higher story count for slightly shorter articles.

We've also picked up a new reviews editor, Scott, who will be organising that section, leaving us with a relatively full house of editors – though we still need a features editor and more correspondents.

So, what do you think? This is all open to debate. Do you like the design? The content? What else would you like to see in here and what would you replace? Let us know at the usual address.

As this is the time of year when a large number of subscriptions become due, we'd like to remind you to renew early if possible. If you want to work out when your subscription expires, above your name on the address label is a number which refers to the issue when your subscription runs out. For example, this issue is vol 69 no 1, so if your sub ran out with this issue you'd have 6901 above your name. Many thanks in advance.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 2nd February 2008 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 24th January. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

In my job I have lots of interactions with a local authority and several housing management companies. While I can only sit back and wonder at some of the decisions that they make, one of the things that has stood out in the last five years or so is the number of times I need to get involved in changing logos.

While departments and sections that deal with mundane things like repairs and rents never seem to have much clout, the marketing department seem to rule the roost. It seems that every council in the area has spent at least six figures in the past five years on redesigning its logo. Lewisham council redesigned its 'brand' in 2006, mainly by changing the font and slant on the word Lewisham and the crown that went alongside it. The council claimed the cost was £18,400 for redesign and £10,400 for the cost of changing it on stationery, vehicles and buildings. The council boasted that these costs (which seem far too low to me) allowed them to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, another feather in the cap for the marketing department. Famously, this included putting a Braille sign on the inside of a window in one office.

Last year, the London Borough of Bexley dropped its Bexley Council logo in favour of using its coat of arms. The previous logo had been in use since 1999, but had been

slightly altered in 2003. I couldn't find any reference to cost.

Councils are nothing compared to some housing management companies, though. In the last five years, one that I have had dealings with has changed its logo four times and its name twice.

The question that all this activity begs is of course why it's such a priority to focus on 'branding' and marketing at all? Who is it aimed at? I can see how Stella Artois or Sainsbury's marketing works, after all, they are trying to persuade consumers that their brand is better. The consumer can then act on that, and drink one lager over another or shop in one supermarket over another.

If I was to argue that I wanted to pay council tax and receive services from a different council, I wouldn't get very far. So what are they marketing?

It's even worse for council housing and housing associations. There aren't enough council or housing association homes. Demand is far higher than supply and most people who want one can't get one. Those who do have one generally have only two choices – buy it and move later or stay put. Again, I fail to see why there's a need for this to be marketed. Why not put the marketing budget to use repairing the homes, or even more unlikely, building new ones?

Blog Bites

(from jackray.co.uk)

When I started temping, years ago back in sleepy Suffolk, it appeared to me it was regarded by most employers as an aberration, for when permanent was not possible or necessary.

When I began temping in Manchester earlier this year however, I noticed some new arrangements. Workloads were larger. If temps finish the tasks to which they are nominally attached they are supposed to go in search of further work.

Since I'm unskilled at stringing out tasks to avoid further ones, I tend toward brief spurts of activity followed by long periods of avoiding authority figures. Managers work this out after a while, and after a couple of weeks I was terminated.

This was followed by an evaluation from my employer. Now, bear in mind the rights of the permanent employee here. Referees are not allowed to give prejudicial references. As a temp though, the evaluation system gives employers the chance to sour a record with the agency, a sort of round-about-way of blacklisting.

So, following a two week placement where I was never made aware of what exactly I was supposed to be doing and no attempt was made to discuss any problems, I was basically placed on a final warning. On my next placement, a manager with unrealistic expectations (he wanted to be sent a housing officer, and instead received a secretary) terminated my placement after I called in sick, and I was struck-off the

agency's list, never to be offered work again.

At this point I received a further eye-opener. Signing up for a large commercial recruitment agency, I was given a pep-talk. The expectations in temping, he said, had changed. What they really wanted was the following: temps never to be sick, temps never to be late, temps never to slack-off, temps not to attend job interviews, temps not to finish their placements before the agreed dates.

All the advantages of 'flexibility' were to cut one-way. The employer was to be flexible to terminate you whenever they liked, for whatever they liked, and the temp was essentially free to do exactly as he was told.

This insecurity is not just an issue for those of us unfortunate enough to be without permanent work. Every temp is one less person in secure employment. Over time, we will all be swamped by this rising tide, unregulated labour market competition has always and will always suit the employer more than the worker, tending toward the worst conditions and the worst pay. The question is how far will we travel down this road before somebody makes a meaningful stand?

This new column, which replaces Imagine If, will showcase the best comment pieces we can find from around the net. If you spot a really good one, forward a link to the usual address.

LETTERS AND COMMENT

Green Party

You reported that the Green Party has had a referendum and decided to adopt a new leadership model (*Freedom*, 15th Dec 2007) but you are wrong to go on to say there is a shift to a defined hierarchy.

The members agreed to change the title of Speakers (elected for one year) to Leader and Co-Leader (elected for two years) and give these people votes on the Executive. Apart from that nothing much changes.

Some of the members were openly derisive about voting to make a cosmetic change which will mislead people inside and outside the Party about its structure.

However readers of *Freedom* can be expected to be suspicious of these changes and expect the Leader to accrue influence within the Party. There will now be a delay while the constitution is changed. After that we wait to see what happens. It doesn't seem to have provoked a serious split so far.

Adrian Williams,

From tragedy to comedy

Marx famously said that history repeats itself, first time as tragedy, second time as farce. Tom Hanks has placed a Hollywood spin on Karl's comments by producing and starring in *Charlie Wilson's War*. It is about the role of Texas Democratic congressman Charlie Wilson in getting the US to arm those in Afghanistan fighting the Soviet Union occupation in the 1980s. It is, apparently, presented as a comedy.

The film is based on a book by George Crile and its original subtitle gives an indication of a key problem with both book and film: *The Extraordinary Story of the*

Largest Covert Operation in History – the Arming of the Mujahideen. For Crile, the key was that lots of Soviet soldiers were killed in a war which contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Strangely, he fails to mention the subsequent activities of his 'freedom fighters' – their attacks on the US after the Soviet collapse.

In other words, Wilson's work in relation to Afghanistan led directly to the blowback that peaked on September 11 and, with some help from the Bush Junta, to the current bloody invasion and occupation of Iraq. The film follows in this. There is a vague reference to subsequent events. In an 'epilogue' to the book, Crile quoted Wilson: "These things happened. They were glorious and they changed the world. And the people who deserved the credit are the ones who made the sacrifice. And then we fucked up the endgame." The film also ends with this just before the credits roll.

Unless you are well versed in geopolitical history neither the reader nor the audience member would know that this was referring to how the Afghan 'freedom fighters' of the 1980s turned into the al Qaeda and Taliban of the 1990s and 2000s. For all the joy in presenting Wilson's 'out of channel' attempts to garner secret appropriations of millions of dollars to the guerrillas, it fails to discuss the consequences of such acts or the fact when the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989 the US lost interest in the country and left it to descend into civil war. The 'endgame', you would think, turns this 'comedy' into a tragedy of epic proportions. Surely the US helping to build Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda base and how the millions of dollars worth of weapons Wilson helped to secretly supply ended up being turned on the US are important facts?

Another important fact which the book and film fail to note is that the CIA started to support the mujahedeen before the USSR

invasion. For the CIA legally to carry out a covert action, the president must authorise it. The book repeatedly says that President Carter authorised the CIA to provide covert backing to the mujahedeen after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. In reality, he did so on 3rd July 1979, i.e. six months before the Soviet invasion.

This was done on the advice of his national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who confirmed this in January 1998 in an interview in the French newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur*: "I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention." He had no regrets, stating it "had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap ... The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter. We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war." Secretary of Defense, and former CIA Director, Robert Gates confirms this in his 1996 memoirs.

So the 'freedom fighters' of the mujahedeen were used as cannon fodder by Washington to give the USSR its own Vietnam. Which they did – but with horrific consequences not only for the Soviet Union. Mentioning those would, undoubtedly, have undermined the comic potential of the illegal activities of a politician subverting the normal channels of democratic accountability within the US government to bolster the covert actions of the secret state in pursuit of American imperialist ends.

I.M.

Publication of 'An Anarchist FAQ'

As has been displayed on An Anarchist FAQ (AFAQ) for some time, volume one of it was scheduled to be published by AK Press in Britain in 2007. We had hoped to launch it at the Anarchist Bookfair in London back in October.

Sadly, that has not happened yet. While AFAQ was sent to AK Press on time, it has taken longer for AK press to lay it out and proof read it than we thought. To be fair, though, even volume one is massive so our original timetable was too optimistic!

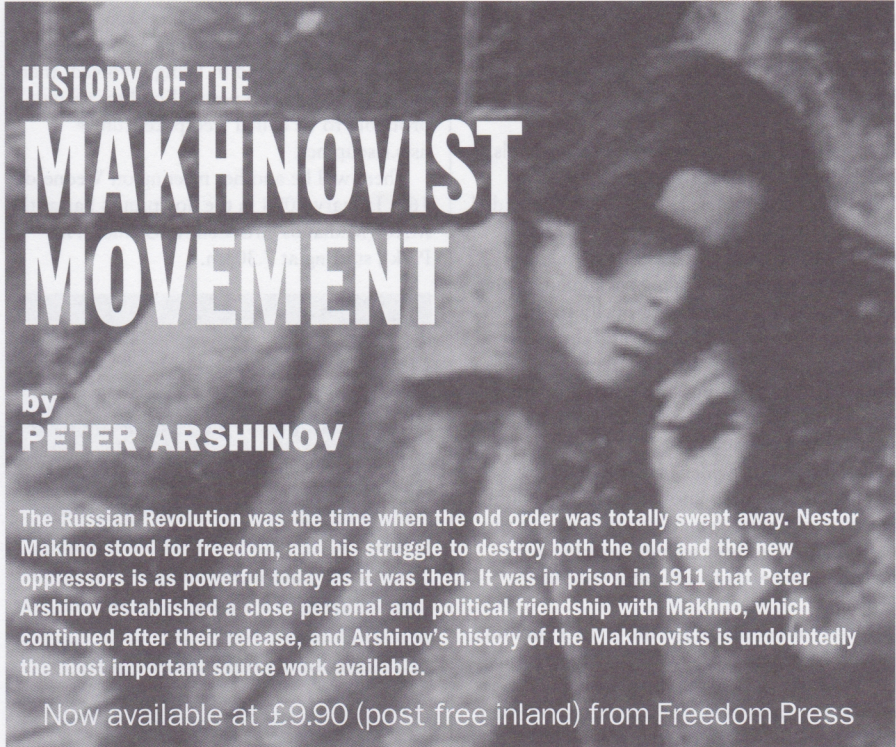
The good news is that proof reading is about halfway through and, hopefully, it will be ready for March. Ideally, we will be launching it on 18th March in Glasgow, Scotland, with another meeting in Edinburgh the next day. A meeting will be organised at the London Anarchist Bookfair as well.

We will keep you notified of any developments but hopefully the next announcement will be one stating that volume one has been published!

Obviously, with the delay with volume one, volume two will be released sometime in 2009. In terms of the webpage, section H (on Marxism) is currently being revised and should be uploaded before March.

Iain McKay

www.anarchistfaq.org



HISTORY OF THE MAKHNOVIST MOVEMENT

by
PETER ARSHINOV

The Russian Revolution was the time when the old order was totally swept away. Nestor Makhno stood for freedom, and his struggle to destroy both the old and the new oppressors is as powerful today as it was then. It was in prison in 1911 that Peter Arshinov established a close personal and political friendship with Makhno, which continued after their release, and Arshinov's history of the Makhnovists is undoubtedly the most important source work available.

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GETTING ACTIVE

PRISONS

Solidarity with Aussie G20 prisoners

Australian anarchists are calling out for letters of support and solidarity for anarchists arrested and facing severe repression after the G20 economic forum protests of November 2006 in Melbourne, Australia.

On the weekend of 18–19th November 2006, the G20 Meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors was held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Melbourne, Australia. The G20 meeting happens annually and is attended by finance ministers from 20 nations, including the USA, the European Union and China amongst others.

A counter summit was held the week before at a recently squatted social centre, A Space Outside. Within the two days prior to the G20 protests, both the 'A Space Outside' squat and another squatted Anarchist social centre 'The Wake' were evicted by a special G20 police task force 'Salver', and footage taken by the police was later used to arrest activists involved in the protests.

A special police task force 'Salver' was set up to arrest those involved in the protest, and with their own footage, and that which they forced people to give them, they made a list of 28 'persons of interest' whose photographs were published in a mainstream newspaper, despite this breaking numerous codes of conduct.

Over 40 people have been arrested for their involvement in the protests, with charges of riot and affray, assault of a police officer, property damage, and theft. Those arrested have their lives effectively run by the state, with most having to report into a police station every two weeks and not being able to travel outside of their state. Messages of solidarity to afterg20@gmail.com or post or posted on sydney.indymedia.org.au (melbourne.indymedia fell apart after the post g20 backlash)

Punk for Pavel

Moscow-based label RRR have re-released the second album of Partiya, an anarcho-punk band from Minsk. All proceeds from the album go to anarchist class struggle prisoner Pavel Delidon.

Pavel Delidon is an anarchist, anti-fascist and animal rights activist from Stariy Oskol in the south-west of Russia. Last July he was given a five-year sentence for an attempt to collect wages his former boss had no intention of paying.

Pavel was originally charged with "armed robbery by illegal trespassing" (statute 162 paragraph 3 of Russian criminal codex – Pavel had pepper spray with him) which carries a minimal sentence of seven years, but the judge was very lenient considering the positive role of Pavel in his community. However the local court has refused to open a criminal case against his boss for wage arrears, a decision which is currently being appealed with a good prospect of a success. If a case against his boss is opened, Pasha's crime may be reconsidered as 'vigilantism', which carries much lesser sentence – from probation to five years.

Pasha is studying English in prison, so any letters in English are highly appreciated by him!

• Pavel Delidon, ul. Timiryazeva-1, FGU IK-7,
309990 Valuyki Russia

Download songs from Partiya at distro-fik.375crew.org/partiya_music.html or go to myspace.com/partiya



● The rampART social centre (pictured above is artwork at the entrance) is finally facing eviction after almost four years of providing a non-commercial venue for a wide range of activities. On the 12th of December, the social centre and the squatted houses in the street were all served with notice of court proceedings for repossession. On the 20th, the case was heard and a possession order granted from the 3rd of January 2008. The occupation however has continued and an appeal has been filed against the court ruling.

There have been various meetings to plan what happens next and to organise opening new spaces. It is not known how long the appeal process is likely to take but proposals for event bookings will continue as normal. The collective meets every Monday evening at 7pm.

● Riseup.net, the online service for radicals, has launched a new project called Riseup Labs. For seven years, riseup.net has provided secured, movement-run services to combat online surveillance by the state.

Riseup Labs is developing social networking software that is geared specifically to the needs of network organising and democratic collaboration. There are also plans to make riseup.net nearly impossible to shut down, to provide new services, and greatly enhance security and privacy.

In order to get wider input, Riseup are starting an initiative known as the 'Freedom Summer of Code', which hopes to access the vast talent of activist techies worldwide by providing stipends to complete specific projects.

Money is needed to get the project running. Riseup have secured \$5,000 matching funds, but these are only available if enough cash is raised. They are asking for donations to Riseup Labs, PO Box 4282, Seattle, WA 98194

● Representatives of various radical groups in Birmingham have had a meeting to discuss future possibilities for an autonomous social centre in Birmingham. This meeting represented a major coming together of hitherto unconnected campaign groups and social movements.

While there was definite interest in a short term squatted/occupied social space happening in Spring 2008, the main focus of the meeting was on possibilities for a stable, long-term social centre, roughly along the lines of the Sumac Centre in Nottingham or the Common Place in Leeds (run as a members' club and co-operative).

The email account freespacebrum@riseup.net has been created as a contact email for anyone interested in being involved; there will also be a riseup.netmailing list created, probably to be called freespacebrum@lists.riseup.net.

There will be another meeting on Wednesday 16th January 2008 in the downstairs bar at the MAC (Midlands Arts Centre, Cannon Hill Park), starting at 7.30pm.



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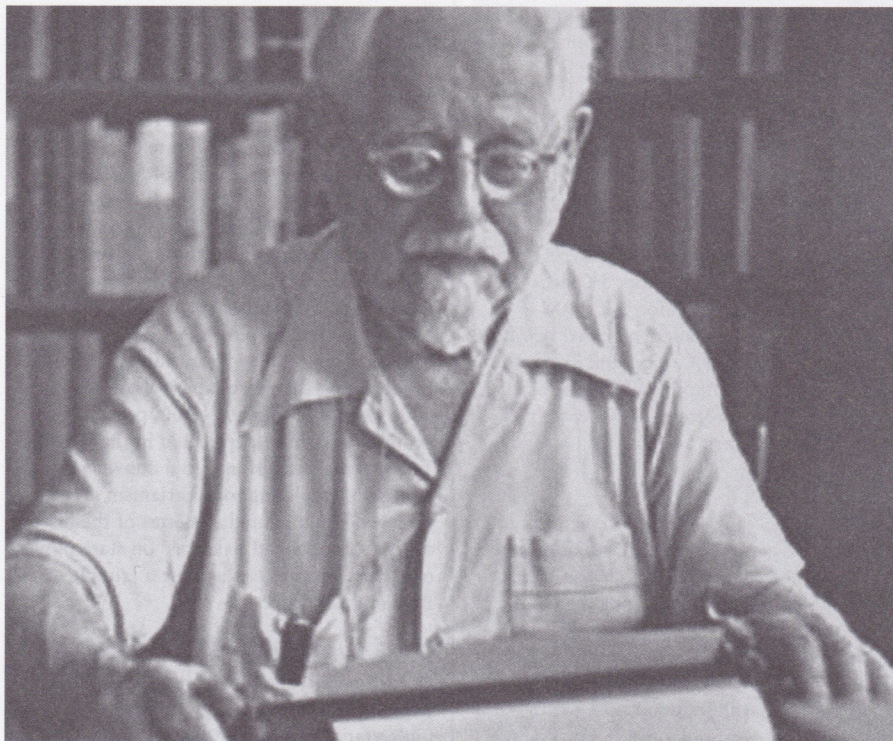
Anarcho-syndicalism

Historically one of the most prominent forms of social anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism is a school of thought that views labour unions as a potential force for revolutionary social change, capable of replacing capitalism and the State with a new society democratically self-managed by the workers.

The basic idea behind anarcho-syndicalism is to create an industrial workers' union movement based on anarchist ideas, aiming eventually to abolish the wage system and state or private ownership of the means of production, which anarcho-syndicalists believe lead to class divisions. Its proponents advocate decentralised, federated unions that use various forms of direct action (i.e. action concentrated on directly attaining a goal, as opposed to indirect action, such as electing a representative to a government position) to achieve reforms under capitalism until they are strong enough to overthrow it.

Anarcho-syndicalists believe that conventional trade unions of the kind prevalent today undermine worker solidarity by dividing workers by trade. In America for example, industrial disputes would sometimes see violent clashes between workers of different unions who would ignore each other's requests to respect picket lines. The aim of anarcho-syndicalism, on the other hand, is to unite all workers into 'One Big Union' controlled by its members from the grassroots. This is obviously in deep contrast to the current reformist unions who are filled with layer upon layer of bureaucrats who can call off industrial action regardless of the wishes of the membership. The kind of union democracy anarcho-syndicalism proposes puts control of workers' struggles where it belongs: with the workers themselves. Similarly in contrast to reformist trade unions, anarcho-syndicalists don't view strikes as the only legitimate form of industrial action, but encourage various kinds of direct action including occupations, sabotage and sit-ins, to win industrial disputes.

According to one of the ideology's early and most celebrated proponents, Rudolf Rocker, the anarcho-syndicalist union would also serve as "the elementary school of Socialism". In his article *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, Rocker, who was one of the most popular voices in the early anarcho-syndicalist movement and a prominent figure among Jewish immigrant workers in London's East End during the early twentieth century, argued that the anarcho-syndicalist union serves a dual purpose, "1. To enforce the demands of the producers for the safeguarding and raising of their standard of living; 2. To acquaint the workers with the technical management of production and economic life in general and prepare them to take the socio-economic organism into their own hands and shape it according to socialist principles."



Rudolf Rocker

In short, in contrast to modern unions, anarcho-syndicalist unions aim not just to gain improvements in working conditions, but to lay the foundations of the new society "within the shell of the old", preparing workers for the direct democracy, self-activity and mutual aid needed if the future society is to succeed.

Like all libertarian communists, anarcho-syndicalists (in Rocker's words) argue that "a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by ... the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves". Political parties are not just unnecessary for social change, but actually hold it back. These parties (even those claiming to represent the workers) stifle working class self-activity either by attempting to negotiate with government, or by trying to lead the working class to victory. Anarcho-syndicalism holds that workers should take direct action to get better conditions at work and gain social and political reforms, while always focused on revolution and workers' control as their ultimate goal. An example of this in practice would be the Spanish CNT (National Confederation of Labour) striking for the release of political prisoners in the beginning of the twentieth century, and British construction workers doing the same in the 1970s.

Workplace organising and the organising of those in paid employment are not the sole focus of anarcho-syndicalism. Its supporters advance and participate in many forms of

community organising, arguing for the building of residents' associations and radical community groups to build working class power in the community, using tactics like rent strikes to gain improvements in conditions. Anarcho-syndicalists also believe in the organisation of the unemployed, housewives, students and other unwaged workers into the 'One Big Union'.

Many contemporary anarchists argue that anarcho-syndicalism is more of an anarchist workplace organisational structure than an economic system in and of itself. Historically most anarcho-syndicalists were/are also anarcho-communists (such as Lucy Parsons) or anarcho-collectivists (such as Buenaventura Durruti) but there have been many anarcho-syndicalists who preferred mutualist-type economic arrangements such as Joseph Labadie.

Up to the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, anarcho-syndicalist unions and organisations were the dominant actors in the revolutionary left. Between 1905 and 1939, the ideology gained a prominent position in the workers' movements of France, Italy and Spain (the CNT playing a leading role in the Spanish Civil War and Revolution in 1936–39) as well as in the United States and Latin America, where anarchism was the predominant force in the workers' movement in many countries. Today, though not as powerful a force as it once was, anarcho-syndicalism continues to play a significant role in workers' struggles in areas of Western Europe.

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON
JANUARY

19th Talk by Loren Goldner, hosted by *Mute* magazine, 'From Mass Strike to Casualisation and Retreat: The Korean Working Class 1987-2007', which will focus on the recent history of class struggle in Korea, from 6pm at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, London N1 9DX.

21st Talk by Loren Goldner, hosted by *Mute* magazine, 'Class Struggle and the Adamic Imagination in Herman Melville', which will explore the mid-19th century crisis of the bourgeois ego and the emergence of the working class onto the stage of world history, as echoed in Melville's novels, from 6pm at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, London N1 9DX.

22nd Talk by Loren Goldner, hosted by *Mute* magazine, 'Fictitious Capital and Today's Global Crisis', from 6pm at The Whitechapel Centre, 85 Myrdle Street (off Commercial Road), Whitechapel, London E1.

FEBRUARY

9th and 10th National Squatters Meeting in Leeds to discuss the squatting situation and build stronger networks between squats and autonomous spaces throughout the UK, email squatmeetup@googlemail.com

17th Southampton's Third Seed Swap from 10am to 4pm at Woolston Community Centre, Woolston, Southampton, for more details see octoberbooka.org/seedswap.

MARCH

Smash EDO Tour 2008 – for almost four years the Smash EDO campaign have been demonstrating outside EDO/MBM, the US arms manufacturers in Brighton, and the campaign will be touring the UK (or beyond) showing the new full length film *On The Verge*. Initially the campaign is looking for dates in March/April, the tour will allow those involved in the campaign to discuss tactics, get feedback, and organise for the future, so if you want the tour to visit your area email on-the-verge@hotmail.com or you can see the *On The Verge* trailer at smashedo.org.uk

APRIL

1st Fossil Fools Day, a day of action against the fossil fuel industry called by Rising Tide International, see fossilfuelsday.org or risingtide.org.uk for more.

MAY

17th May Anarchist Bookfair hosted by the 1 in 12 Club, 21-23 Albion Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD1 2LY, from 12 noon until 6pm (stalls at £5 a table) followed by a Social in the evening.

18th May Anarchist Writers, Publishers and Design, a seminar attracting those who write for and/or publish anarchist publications, hosted by the 1 in 12 Club, 21-23 Albion Street, Bradford, from 10am until 4pm, tickets £5, for bookings contact sam@samjackson6.orangehome.co.uk or call 0777 914 7005

FILM

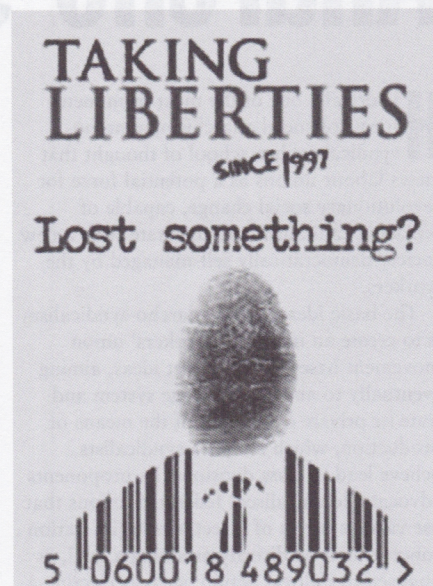
Taking Liberties

written and directed by Chris Atkins

A summary of recent attacks on free citizenship in Britain, this documentary was made for cinema because such a 'one-sided' (i.e. honest) appraisal of the Blair regime's record would not survive the requirements of 'balance' (i.e. censorship) on television. Supported by the producers of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the film apes his populist combo of comic buffoonery and acid commentary in romping through New Labour's neurotic erosion of rights to privacy, protest and freedom of speech, and the more-or-less tacit embrace of imprisonment without trial, unaccountable extradition and torture. Emphasising the personal experiences of a wide swathe of victims – from peace protesters to those persecuted in the War on Terror – the background to a convincing picture of escalating totalitarianism is then sketched via animated vignettes of the history of legal 'checks and balances' on state power over the centuries, set against a jaunty Britpop backdrop.

Doing the Rights Thing

Unfortunately, the film's broad-brush knee-jerk jingoism cripples any political understanding of either past or present. Ancient constitutional precedents are all very well for patronising children with, but the routine reality of peremptory injustice in recent decades has shaped the patterns of close monitoring and control now being ratcheted up – from Northern Ireland policy and racist policing to the internment of immigrants, and from Tory anti-union and criminal justice legislation to the intensifying harassment of 'antisocial' behaviour. After the fallout from colonialism, kowtowing to global capitalism necessitates that living standards and welfare suffer, while lower-class community, collectivity and autonomy is hammered to shortcircuit resistance resistance – but *Taking Liberties* is oblivious to the structural and economic framework within which governments discipline their subjects, let alone how they achieve apparent consent for it. Instead we're asked to sympathise with



rich bankers the Yanks suspect of corporate fraud – after all, 'we're all in this together'; a supposedly 'freedom-loving' people ...

The potential of mocking the powerful is further undermined by a tone veering from flippant to hysterical, with overstatements of incipient Nazi-ness among political leaders corresponding to astonishing naivete about influencing them. To Chris Atkins: "Our only hope is that Brown is desperate to claw back some of the popularity that Blair has lost, so if it becomes a big political issue then he might turn back the authoritarian tide to try and win votes" (*Socialist Review*); and "If several thousand people go to mass lone demos the Metropolitan police will beg Gordon Brown to repeal the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act" (www.eyeforfilm.co.uk). In other words, *Taking Liberties* may be better than nothing for removing blinkers among viewers somehow previously unaware of what time it is. But the fatal lack of analysis or insight leaves it wallowing in middle-class moral superiority and outrage, and self-righteous symbolic protest – which ultimately comprise more a recipe for apathy than revolt.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. A revolt by 700 Chinese forced labourers in Hanaoka, 30th June 1945, against inhuman treatment by Japanese construction firm Kajima. More than 130 were tortured to death. In 1995, Kajima agreed to pay 500 million yen in compensation, though no apology was forthcoming from the Japanese government.
2. Darien, in the isthmus of Panama. The area was described by the colonists who survived as a "waste, howling wilderness". It was surrounded by the Spanish army, who were understandably hostile to someone else's attempt to steal the wealth

of Central America.

3. After thousands of Scottish investors lost all their money in the Darien adventure, the English government offered them every penny back, plus 42% interest, if they accepted the Union Treaty, which abolished the Scottish Parliament.
4. Félix Fénéon, who had written for anarchist papers in the 1890s, got a job writing for *Le Matin* in 1906. He was given the task of writing the short three-line pieces, known as *chiens écrasés* ('run-over dogs'). They have been collected in English as *Novels in Three Lines*.

Ignorant is bliss?

The Feeding of the 5,000? Fleecing is more like it, says Jason R

Okay, this ain't about to be a potted history of Crass (if you don't know by now, you never will!). In a few words, this was the closest to a reunion by the most influential 'band' of all time you're ever gonna get ... but I don't think I can remember the last time a gig caused such controversy – I mean the Sex Pistols actually called their reunion the 'We are only in it for the money' tour (just in case you wondered). No, this was a very different beast.

To recap, never before had a band been so seriously influential, from the graffiti of toilet walls, to the houses of Parliament, to the modern eco/animal liberation movement, and way beyond – good old Crass, you either loved em, or hated em, but fuck me, you had to take them seriously, they meant it. To a vast majority of the two day event's audience (and bear in mind, those of us who can remember the start of all this are getting on a bit!), this shoulda felt like a near religious experience – Crass changed my life from their start, and that of many thousands around the globe. Yet this felt more like a 'museum' style experience – a choice set of dusty exhibits (e.g. songs and balding ex-punks), rolled out karaoke style, just hoping everyone remembered the words (we did!). Most importantly, it couldn't even be called a Crass gig (thank fuck!), as the only original member there was cockney diamond geezer, original Crass vocalist Steve Ignorant, and 'friends'. The other members of Crass kept a respectful



Steve Ignorant on stage at The Feeding of the 5,000 and, below left, the poster

silence, except their oft most outspoken member Penny, who slagged the whole thing rotten, in the *Guardian*, my how things have changed! ... oh, and a friend is sure that he saw Gee on the tube ...

Anyway, why did this put people's backs up so much? Well, a few points. Crass would always sell their records at just about cost price, and any profits from these, or their gigs, went straight to charity ... *every penny*. This gig on the other hand cost £17.50 per day, or £30 for two, for 5,000 people – where's the money gone Steve? Not to mention the merchandise stall, £15 for a t-shirt? I repeat – where's the money gone?

And why over two days? This coulda so easily been over one day, the aggro caused by everyone having to crash overnight in London was a nightmare. And really ... why do it at all? What was it all about in the first place? Being as how it was one-off (I hope!), was it just an old punks piss up? If so, then fine, I ain't got no problem with that (I fucking bought tickets didn't I?). But that's all it was, surely, a drunken karaoke? I hope this draws some debate, I really do (come on Steve, let's hear some answers!).

And the gig? What can I say, I've got to be honest, some of it was stunning!! Many old faces about, Conflict were on awesome form, and getting to see Zoundz and Flux for the first time ... just the best time.

And Steve's band? Well, the excitement in the air before he came on was incredible, the air crackled, and yes, I shouted myself hoarse to every word of Feeding ... and yes, it was

great pogo-ing all covered in (expensive) beer.

But then, oh no oh no ... the encore, where rocked up versions of all the old singles came piling out, the 'greatest hits' as it were, and suddenly 'what am I doing here?' – a huge electric screen with an animated Crass logo spinning around? A fucking glitter ball?!!

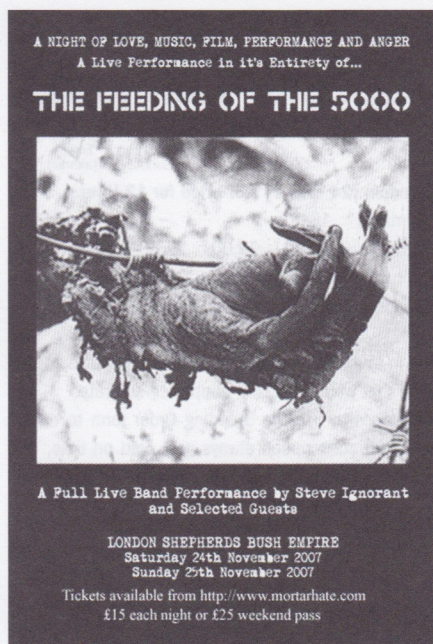
No, it was too much, and I left early on the Sunday, to avoid seeing it again.

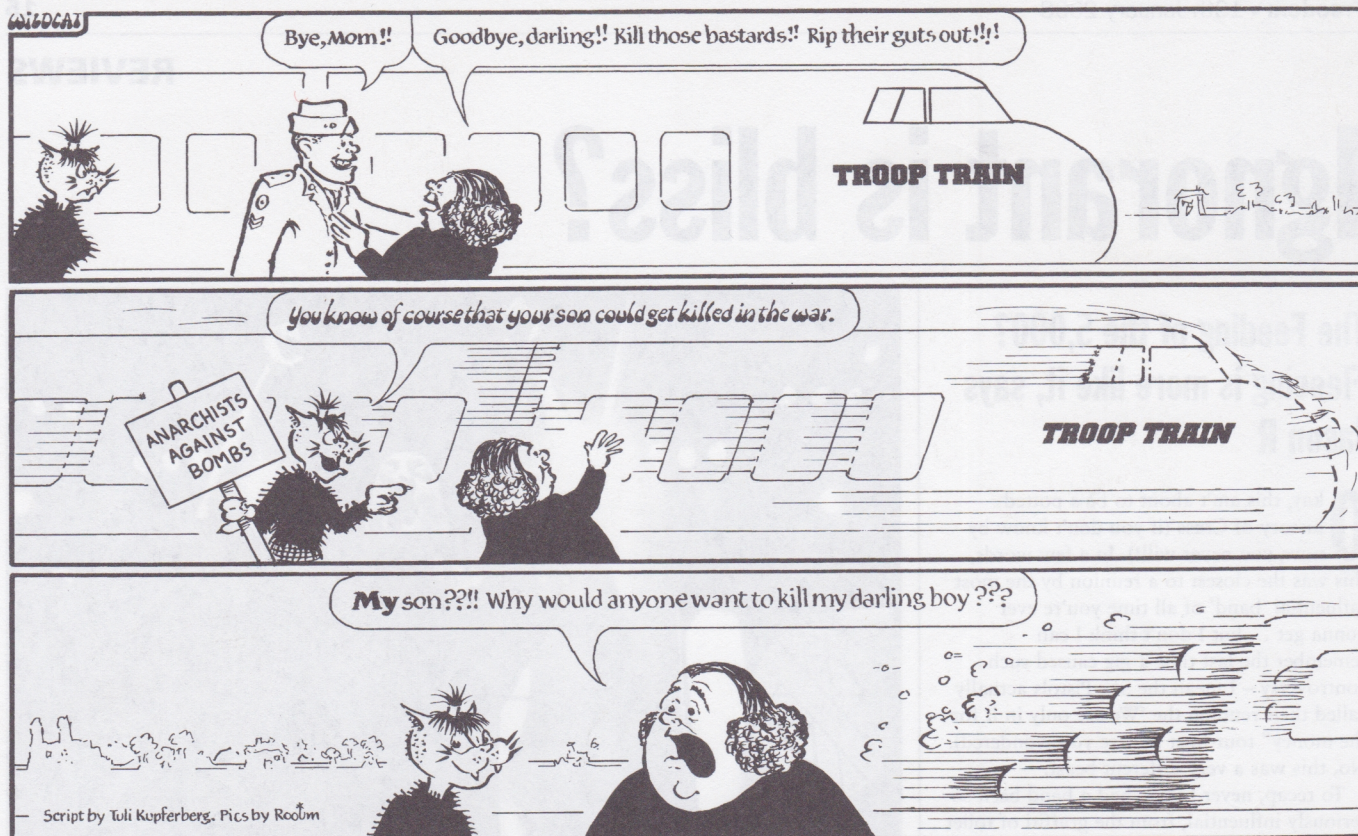
A special mention must go to the Saturday night after-hours gig as well, blinding sets from Rubella Ballet, Anima Mundi, Police Bastard etc. – you had to be there, as the mile long queue of ticketless fans outside will be pleased to hear.

So, the whole thing was a real mystery, you wanted to hate the Crass reunion bollocks, but outta curiosity, (and yes, all my mates were going!) I'm glad I went along. But quite frankly, when I see the serious art projects, permaculture, anti-war events etc that the other members of Crass have immersed themselves in since the band split – well, I'm sorry Steve, but leave us with some fun memories, *and don't do it again!*

His is written with the greatest of respect still to Steve Ignorant, and all other performers on the day. They will surely thank me for being honest. I hope this article starts some kind of debate. By the way, cheers to Colin and Ferenc for being stars and sorting ticket fuck ups out for us ...

Steve Ignorant and friends, 'The Feeding of the 5,000' at the Sheperds Bush Empire on 24th and 25th November 2007





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CROSSWORD

The answers to the prize crossword which appeared in our December issue, and many thanks to our crossword compiler, Bjarni Halfnelson.

Across: 1 Proudhon, 7 Gazette, 8 Olden, 9 Lair, 11 Idle, 12 Odes, 14 Wildcat, 17 Deep, 18 Forger, 19 Tyburn, 20 Hay, 21 Pardon, 22 Slip up, 23 Iris, 25 Mounted, 26 Hash, 28 Fens, 29 Rash, 30 Image, 32 Free men, 33 Absentee.

Down: 1 Property is theft, 2 Odd, 3 Donald Room, 4 Care, 5 Demo, 6 News from Nowhere, 7 Gilt, 9 Lice, 10 Adaptations, 13 Degraded, 14 Wobblies, 15 Den, 16 Dongas Tribe, 21 Pin, 24 Rush, 25 Mean, 27 Heel, 28 Free, 31 Art.

And we'd like to congratulate the first two winners drawn out of the hat, who were Frank from Liverpool and Richard from Carmarthenshire. Your prizes will be arriving shortly.

THE QUIZ

1. What was the Hanaoka Incident?
2. Where did the Company of Scotland Tradeing to Affrica and the Indies try to establish a colony, along the lines of the Dutch East India Company?
3. What was the 'Equivalent', paid after the failure of the Company of Scotland in 1707?
4. Which anarchist wrote news in three lines?

Answers on page 14

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